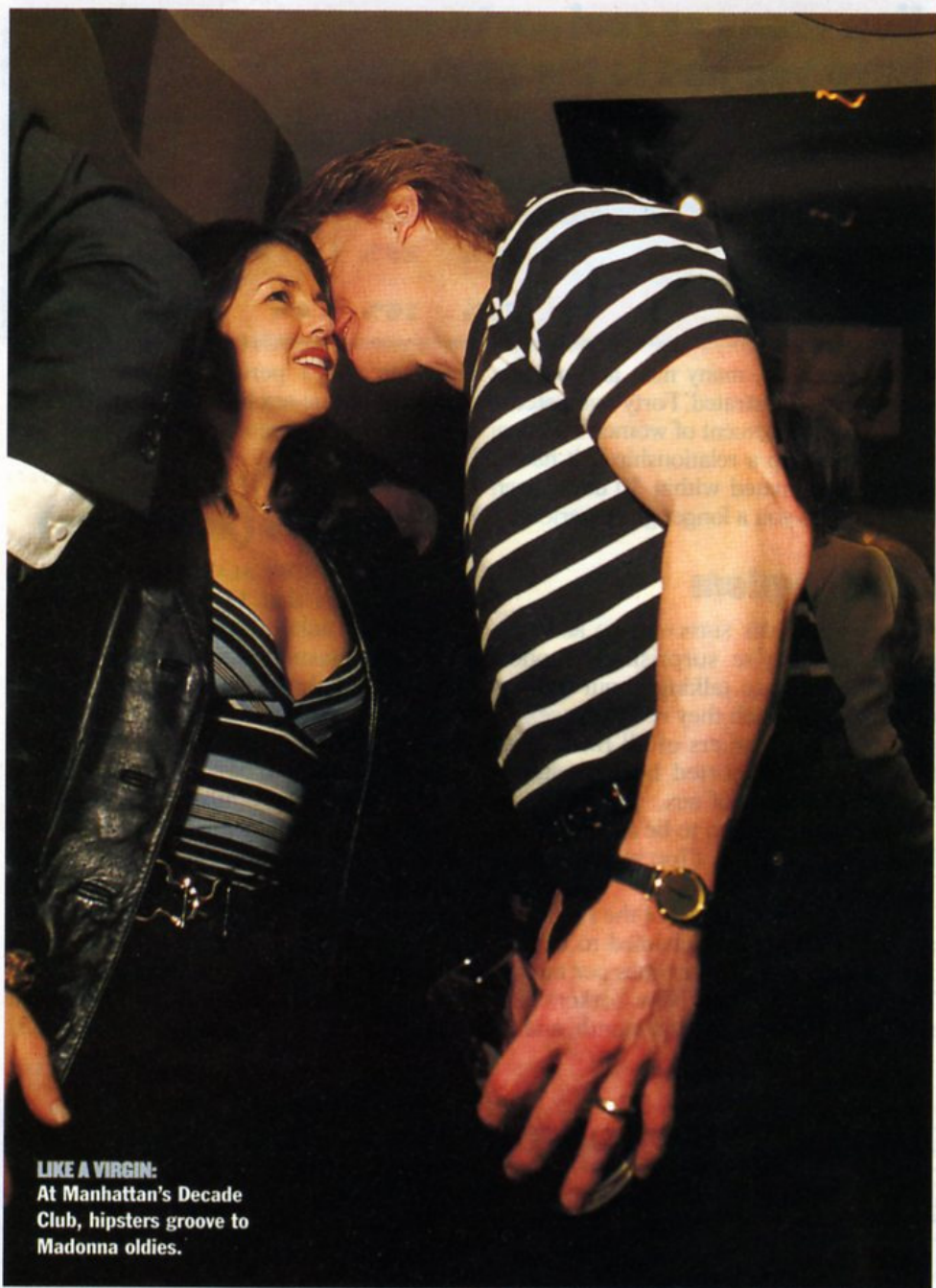


Report from the front

It's a war zone out there. Casualties mount. Supplies are low. Time is short. Everyone is insane. But single New Yorkers soldier on, looking for love. **By Nancy Jo Sales**



LIKE A VIRGIN:
At Manhattan's Decade Club, hipsters groove to Madonna oldies.

How do you normally meet?

Even in the Age of Spandex, single New Yorkers are more likely to pick up dates at church than at their local gym.

Friends	30%
Clubs	12%
Bars/restaurants	10%
Parties	9%
Work	9%
Place of worship	3%
Prof. connections	2%
Cultural events	2%
Blind dates	1%
Gym	1%
Lectures	1%
Personal ads	1%
Internet	0%

THERE ARE 1.3 MILLION SINGLE men in New York, 1.8 million single women, and of these more than 3 million people, about two thirds have never married. "I'm starting to think I never will," says Sandra Korsak, a pert 33-year-old artist in a hat made of a white fur she identifies as "rat." It's not that Korsak doesn't want to find a long-term mate, she says, but "most of the people in this city are insane."

Such despair—bordering on horror, drifting toward resignation—was echoed by most of the singles approached at bars and other random spots throughout the city. "You'd think, Whoa, I'm single in New York, great! But it's not all it's cracked up to be," says Jason Brand, 20, an NYU drama student collared on a downtown subway platform, where he was caught practicing his tap-dancing routine. "It's more like playing Russian roulette," Brand says. "Some girl tells you she works at the pastry shop down the street, but then it turns out she's a terrorist spy who puts on a doggie collar at night at the Vault. You can't trust anybody."

Being single in New York is "difficult," sometimes "trying," almost "a pathological state," report those who would divulge the intimate details of their love lives in a heartbeat. It seems there simply isn't enough time in the average New Yorker's day to find and woo a significant other—forget about nurturing a satisfying relationship. "You have to hand it to Donald Trump," says Allison Miller, a 26-year-

old freelance writer. "When his marriage to Marla broke up, he said something like, 'Yeah, well, she wanted to work on our relationship, and I work all *day*—I don't want to come home and work.' At least he was honest . . . this time."

"Things get incredibly sped up here," says a real-estate lawyer, 29, who asks not to be named. We're jammed against the wall at the crowded Red Bench, where he says he likes to go because "there are a lot of foreign girls here, and they're usually only in this country a short time—and accents are sexy." "You meet some woman at a bar," he says, "and decide she's the love of your life, because usually you're in the office, where all the women are fighting you tooth and nail to get ahead. So you take her home and you have this whole twisted relationship in a single evening. I call it 'Nine and a Half Hours.' You tell her how your mother screwed up your birthday cake; she tells you her father never took her to see Santa. Then you have sex, and at like four in the morning, you move into the phase I call 'The Crying Game.' She's sitting naked on the edge of your bed weeping—you're not sure why. I used to try and comfort them, but now I just ask them to go home. I feel like a bit of a schmuck, but I have to get up in the morning."

Women also complain that work robs them of time for romance, and that men here treat them like workers. "I don't have the time to become some man's temporary wife—which is what most men mean by girlfriend," says a sales rep for a clothing designer, 35, applying lip gloss in the ladies' room at Tramps. "Unless I know I'm *really* going to marry him. You start going out, and immediately you're the one doing most of the work—the shopping, the cooking, the talking. All that for somebody I might not ever see again in six months? I could have spent the time working out."

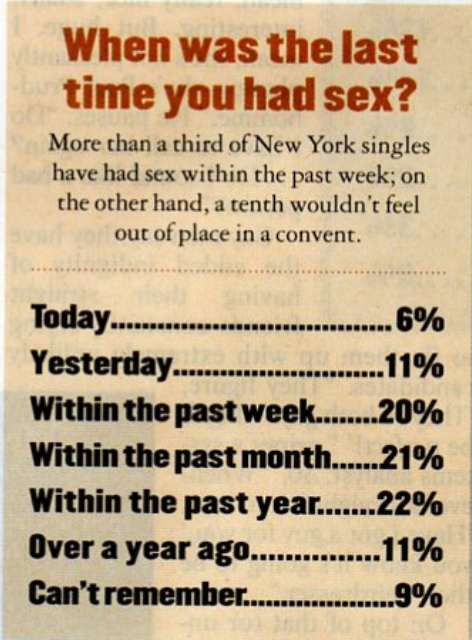
Women despair of the acceleration in intimacy that results from the time crunch, too. "I know it goes against all *The Rules*," says a photo editor, 28, "but you feel like if you don't have sex on the first date, your schedule's not going to permit your seeing each other for another two weeks, and then it's 'Who are you?'"

When sex is out of the question because of the absence of attraction—or

even when sex is still a possibility—both men and women complain that their dates try to turn the evening into a networking opportunity. "Every New York encounter starts out with credential swapping," says Greg Cerio, 37, a writer. "What primitive ritual compares to it? Possibly sniffing."

"I once went out on a date with a musician," says a 31-year-old gay publicist, "and the whole time, he kept asking me if I could get his tape to Russell Simmons. I was like, 'I do publicity for *restaurants*, okay?' And he kept saying, 'But you must know people who know people.'"

Protests from heterosexual men fell into two basic areas: New York women pay too much attention to their dates' wallets and, unlike in the Oval Office, too little to their zippers. "I guess you have to be a



millionaire to get a blow job in this town," says a mid-level manager at a magazine company.

"There's only the most perfunctory acknowledgment of oral sex until you're in a video-renting, Ben & Jerry's-sharing relationship," sighs a midtown waiter.

"New York is a medieval society," says an Israeli architect, 36, fingering his foulard at Dean & DeLuca. "Israel is much more progressive when it comes to relations between the sexes. A modern Israeli girl would *never* assume you are paying her way. I feel like saying to these women in New York, 'I'd like to acquaint

you with an ancient custom, paying for your meal?' It's not just that women in New York don't pay—they don't even say thank you."

"Girls are all looking for a guy in a suit," says Scott Aronowitz, 23, a college student who says he would like to be a professional baseball umpire. "Well, Ted Bundy was a clean-cut guy. Jeffrey Dahmer could put on a suit. Serial killers like to be very unassuming. I've read about this, believe me. David Berkowitz, a nice Jewish kid. Just because they meet some yuppie at Bryant Park, how do they know he's not a serial killer? . . . I like to hang out in the Village," Aronowitz adds. "Women are more down-to-earth there."

Heterosexual women had plenty of pointed things to say about the inadequacies of male New Yorkers as well. An oft-repeated complaint was their tendency to be slippery with the truth. "They're liars," says an actress—wearing a Tweety Bird T-shirt—fresh off the dance floor at Life. "Lie, lie, lie, lie, lie."

"I was seeing this guy," says Antoinette Jones, 23, a student, "and he's telling me all about how independent he is, how he has his own car, makes a lot of money, has an apartment with three bedrooms. Okay. So one night I say I want to come over and see his place. I get there, and sure enough, he has three bedrooms just like he said. He's showing me around. Then he starts to get all nervous, saying that I have to leave, and I say, why? We get into an argument, and all of a sudden his mother and his two sisters come home from work. *They* lived in the bedrooms. He slept on the couch. Oh, and he said he was twentysomething? His mother started yelling at him, and I found out he was 19."

Not only do men in New York lie about their ages and incomes, women say, but they "are the vainest men on the planet." "Check and see where else in the country sells this much men's makeup," says an interior-design assistant, 28, gesticulating impatiently in the aisles of Barneys. "I swear I've seen it in more bathroom cabinets than I can *take*. And they're obsessed with their hair—they all have these creepy weaves and hair plugs, but they'll never admit it."

New York women also say their dating prospects can be chronically unfaithful

of single New Yorkers say they have contracted a sexually transmitted disease

OF THOSE...

- 30% had gonorrhea
- 19% had chlamidia
- 6% had AIDS/HIV
- 6% had genital herpes
- 5% had syphilis

and ungrateful. "I didn't want to sleep with this guy anymore, and he says to me, 'That's okay, baby, New York is a smorgasbord'—a smorgasbord!" says a flight attendant, 30, waiting for the bus. "Like we were pigs in blankets or something. I don't think it was just sour grapes," she continues, demonstrating a knack for food metaphors. "I think that's how they really feel, like there's so many available women in this great big city that they can walk out the door and find some other chick waiting on the corner."

A few women in their forties and fifties have problems along the same lines, saying that men in their age group—particularly if they are well-off—opt for younger women, making them feel like damaged goods. "The only men who ask me out anymore are cabdrivers,"

sighs one frustrated woman in her forties. "I'm starting to consider it."

"There really is no suitable place to meet a man in New York if you're over 45," says a female attorney, 52, "except through work, and who wants to go out with someone you work with? You can meet people through friends, but by the time you get to my age, you pretty much know everybody in your circle. And I'm way past the point of approaching strangers."

"Every person you meet turns out to be a burn victim or totally crazy or has some weird history," snaps an art gallery manager, 34. "There's always some dirty little secret." Just ask the female photographer who went on a blind date only to find out that her companion for the evening was an arachnophile. "I walk in to his apartment—a loft in TriBeCa—and he says, 'I want you to meet my tarantula. His name is Bunny.' Then he says, 'Let me show you my black widow. Look, she's about to have babies.' She had a big sac on her. Then he took me to see *In*

How many dates have you had in the past year?

Can it be that unattached New Yorkers are living at the office? They aren't working overtime on mating: Only half had more than ten dates in the past year.

None	11%
1-10	40%
11-20	13%
20-49	14%
50-69	6%
70-89	2%
90-99	3%
100 plus	8%

to fix them up with extremely unlikely candidates. "They figure, 'They're both gay—they'll be perfect!'" gripes a systems analyst, 30. "Whenever a straight friend says, 'Have I got a guy for you,' you know it's going to be their hairdresser."

On top of that (or underneath) is the problem of the New York gay male who pretends to be straight—or the straight male who pretends to be gay. "You've gone to bed with someone eight times, and then they tell you in this very earnest tone, 'Well, I'm not really gay, you know,'" says one man. "One time it happened with an actor I was seeing, and I said, 'What, were you practicing for a role?'"

Cold Blood at Void.

"Blind dates are the worst," says a filmmaker, 34. "You come away from them thinking, What kind of loser must my friends think I am to think I'd want to go out with this person?"

"Recently, a woman friend of mine tells me, 'You have to meet So-and-so,'" he continues. "I saw this flicker in her husband's eye, like 'Don't do it!,' but I guess he was too scared to say anything. So I go meet this woman for dinner at the Gotham Bar and Grill, and she's fine, I mean, really nice, smart, interesting. But huge. I mean, she's not pleasantly plump—she's Paul Prudhomme." He pauses. "Do I have to call her again? ... Do I sound like a bad person?"

Gay men say they have the added indignity of having their straight friends constantly trying

"Let's face it," says a lesbian, 39, who describes herself as "a recovering editor." "It's impossible to develop a relationship in New York City. Everyone is intimidated by the prospect of happiness. They'd much rather suffer."

And whine to their friends. Life imitates art—or at least *Seinfeld*—in New York, where every bad date, every searing relationship, turns into another great story for your cronies. "The first thing I do after a bad date is go home and call up my friends and tell them about it," says the woman who had to spend the evening with the man who kept spiders. "The next morning I come into the office and tell all my friends there about it. And then we all get to work."

But some people still dance. At the coffee shop in the Barnes & Noble on Union Square, I actually came across a happy couple, who say they met "dancing the Argentine tango." They would not give their names because, they warned, "the New York tango community is very insular—and very jealous." She was quite a bit older than he—around 45 to his 25—and both were wearing the sloppy smiles of people in love. "Tango is about men and women and what goes on when they embrace," she explained. "You are cheek to cheek,

chest to chest, feeling each other's heart beat."

He took out his Walkman, wrapped the headphones around my ears, and suddenly I was hearing what sounded like the soundtrack to a Charles Boyer movie. Then, right there in the book store, the couple started to dance, heavy-lidded, lunging elegantly across the floor.

"Oh, please," said a single friend of mine when I called him up later to tell him about it. "In two months, they'll be throwing knives at each other."

Meanwhile, he added, "I'm happy as a clam here alone with a good book in my bed full of cracker crumbs." ■

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They've had only five partners in their lifetime, but some have had them all in one night.

19%
have had
group sex

13%
have had sex
with a
prostitute

12%
have called
a phone-sex line

of straight New Yorkers have had a homosexual experience.

70% of gay New Yorkers have

had a heterosexual experience.